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ABSTRACT

A total of 446 children, 32 teachers, and 32 teacher aides participated in an evaluation of a program providing instruction to meet the needs of bright/talented/gifted Head Start children. Components of the program included (1) enrichment programing to enhance the critical thinking skills of all Head Start children, (2) identification of bright/talented/gifted Head Start children, (3) programing for identified children in their specific talent areas, (4) programing to involve parents, and (5) strategies for aiding the transition from Head Start to the public school system. Instructional materials were produced by modifying materials developed over a 10-year period in the Retrieval and Acceleration of Promising Young Handicapped and Talented (RAPYHT) program. To evaluate the program, pretest and posttest scores of intervention and comparison groups were analyzed. On Torrance's (1980) "Thinking Creatively in Action and Movement" test, posttest scores of children in the comparison group were substantially lower than their pretest scores, while posttest scores of identified and non-identified children in the intervention group were higher than their pretest scores. On the "Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children" (1983), both identified and non-identified children in the intervention group made gains over their comparison group counterparts. Attitudes of teachers in the intervention group became significantly more positive, while those in the comparison group remained relatively stable. (RH)

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Bringing Out Head Start Talents:

An executive summary

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Bringing Out Head Start Talents: An Executive Summary

Since the inception of Head Start there has been increasing emphasis on educational opportunities for children from disadvantaged and culturally diverse backgrounds (Frasier, 1980). Unfortunatley most of this effort has been directed at children experiencing educational difficulty (Gallagher, 1985). Head Start, for example has made great strides in improving and expanding services to average children and to the 10% of the Head Start population who are diagnosed as handicapped. The children who remain underserved, who are not being stimulated or challenged in ways that foster their full development, are the bright/gifted/talented--the top 10% to 20% enrolled in Heac Start programs.

Although there is general agreement that individuals with outstanding gifts and talents exist in every etnnic, racial, an socio-economic group, childen from these groups are not equally represented in programs designed to meet the needs of bright/gifted/talented childen. The percentage of low-income children being identified as brigt/gifted/talented is far smaller than 1% (Clark, 1983). Clearly, an approach to better serving the bright/gifted/talented among the Head Start population is badly needed.

Project Purpose

Recognizing the need for identifying and more appropriately programming for Head Start children who are potentially or functionaly bright, gifted, or talented, the University of Illinois received funds from the Administration of Children, Youth, and Families for a project entitled Bringing Out Head Start Talents (BOHST), the purpose of which was to adapt procedures and instructonal materials developed in an earlier project funded by the Office of Special Education over a ten-year period (1975-1985) and referred to as RAPYHT (Retrieval and Acceleraton of Promising Young Handicapped and Talented) (Karnes, 1984a, 1984b).

Modification of the RAPYHT materials has made them more appropriate to the Head Start population. The language was clarified, and examples were added to reinforce concepts. Teachers training was made competency-based and geared to an individualized, interpersonal approach. Parent programming and materials were adapted for flexible use in meeting the needs of each family.

Project Components

Components of project BOHST included (a) general enrichment programming, both in the classroom and at home, to enhance the critical thinking skills of all Head Start children, (b) identification processes for determining the bright/gifted/talented children in the Head Start program, using both parent and teacher input, (c) specific programming, both in the classroom and at home, for the identified bright/gifted/talented children in their specific talent area, (d) programming to involve parents of bright/gifted/talented children, and (e) strategies for aiding the transition from the Head Start program to the public school system to ensure continuity of programming. In addition a comprehensive evaluation plan was instituted to determine the impact of the project.

Evaluation Plan

Subjects. Four hundred forty-six Head Start children, thirty-two teachers, and thirty-two teacher aides participated in this research project. The children were drawn from the Head Start program that emcompassed the Illinois counties of Champaign and Vermillion. Vermillion County Head Start sites served as the comparison group and Champaign County Head Start sites served as the intervention group. The comparison group was made up of 212 children, 20 teachers, and 20 teacher aides. The intervention group included 234 children, 12 teachers, and 12 teacher aides.

Instruments. All identified gifted/talented and a randomly selected number of not identified children at both sites were administered the following tests on a pre/post basis: (a) Thinking Creatively in Action and Movement (Torrance, 1980); (b) four selected subtests of the Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children (Kaufman and Kaufman, 1983), Magic Circle, Face Recognition, Gestalt Closure, and Expressive Vocabulary; and (c) the Self-concept and Motivaton Inventory (Milchus, Farrah, and Reitz, 1967). Teachers and aides were given attitude questionnaires on a pre/post basis, that used a semantic differentified approach to measure teachers' degree of positive attitude toward their classes.

Results

Results from this project are extremely encouraging in that it had an impact on teachers, children identified as bright/gifted/talented, and children not identified as bright/gifted/talented (see Karnes and Johnson 1986 for a complete discussion of these results). There are few instances of inservice programs having such a wide impact. On the Torrance, children in the comparison group had substantial descreases on their posttest scores, while scores of both groups of children in the intervention group increased. It appears that children in the intervention group may have become less creative had it not been BOHST training. On the Kaufman both identified bright/gifted/talented and non-identified children made gains over their comparison group counterparts. Moreover, the biggest gains on the Kaufman were made by children not identified as bright/gifted/talented, indicating that exposing children to higher-order thinking skills may have a beneficial impact on all children. In additon, the attitudes of teachers in the intervention group were changed. The way they described their classes became significantly more positive at the end of BOHST training while the descriptions of the comparison group remained relatively stable. This suggests that having teachers focus on identifying the strengths of chidren and then programming for these strengths may improve the teacher's attitude toward these children. It seems that emphazing children's strengths and using strategies provided by BOHST made teaching these children or challenging and enjoyable.

These findings indicate that the main tenets of BOHST--focusing on the strengths of all children with practice in higher-order thinking skills, identifying the bright/gifted/talented children, and providing home and classroom programming for the special talents of the bright/gifted/talented--had a dramatic positive impact on the whole program.

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